

NEGROES TELL OF GRUESOME CRIME

In Crowded Courtroom, Details of Powhatan Tragedy Are Recited.

TONGUES NO LONGER
KEPT STILL BY FEAR

Witnesses Reveal to Jury Horrors
of Night When "Northeast"
Was Burned—Trial May End
To-day, and Electric Chair
Is Already in
Sight.

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POWHATAN, Va., March 23.—With out apparently the least chance of escaping the electric chair, John and Isham Taylor, Lewis Jenkins and John Brown, all colored, who are believed to be the chief conspirators in the most nefarious crime ever perpetrated in Powhatan county—the murder of Mrs. Mary E. Skipwith and Walter G. Johnson, on the night of February 12 and the burning of their home—were put on trial for their lives this afternoon in a courtroom that di-

People from the countryside twenty miles around began arriving early this morning and continued up to a late hour this afternoon. Though there has been some slight apprehension of mob violence, due to the enormity of the crime, the throng proved to be perfectly orderly, and there was not the slightest suggestion that any attempt would be made by the people to take the law into their own hands. There

They came into the village about, or counter horseback, in a buggy, and in a number of wagons, and the square surrounding the court square was lined its entire length with horses and vehicles of every description. Many of the men are staying here to-night, and the hotel and private residences are all filled. It is expected that the crowd will be doubled to-morrow morning, as there was a general impression that the trial would not be gone into until then.

Prisoners Frightened.

The two Taylors, Brown and Jenkins were brought here from Farmville at 12:30 o'clock to-day, under a strong

guard, all armed and ready to prevent trouble. One of the deputies carried a magazine rifle. The others were armed with revolvers. The prisoners were handcuffed in couples. They were made to walk from the depot to the courthouse, a distance of a quarter of a mile. They walked with heads hung down and eyes shifting from side to side, as if they expected momentarily to be used as decorations for the nearest telegraph pole.

The crowd met them in silence and

followed them into the courthouse. Five minutes later Judge George Hurdley had convened court and Clerk Tilman was reading the lengthy indictments, which had been prepared in less than half an hour:

"Are you guilty or not guilty?" the clerk asked the prisoner. "No guilty," he replied in turn, and Brown, the oldest in the lot, and one of the most villainous looking type, shook his head vigorously and asserted half a dozen times his innocence. The crowd listened grimly. Sheriff E. A. Baugh stood ready to

them to order, but there was no sound reason for it. Every one expects conviction, and it is generally expressed that the law should be allowed to take its course. Thirty veniremen had been summoned for the petit jury. The grand jury indicted the prisoners on a charge of burglary, being out at least half an hour. The jury heard only one witness, Stead Johnson, between thirteen and fourteen years old. None of the prisoners knows his exact age. Each called on the other to corroborate his idea of his age. None can read and write. All are hopelessly ignorant, but the

They planned well, but the one mistake they made was hiding the stolen property in the barn and stables, and that is what will probably cost them their lives.

Only six witnesses were examined. The negroes told practically the same story that has been printed. They admitted having lied in original confessions, because, as each said, they were afraid of the vengeance of the two Taylors who had threatened them with death if they ever allowed even a word to slip from their mouths.

kins, who told only of viewing the dead bodies in the ruins; W. S. Johnson, brother of the murdered man, and Stepheney Johnson, Fleming Johnson, Robert Johnson, who are indicted for complicity in the murder, and Deputy Sheriff Traylor, of Henrico county.

The evidence of the negroes has already been published. Each admitted having lied the first time. But the fear of punishment and the working of small consciences finally wrung the truth from them.

Fleming Johnson expressed it all

his explanation of why he finally told the truth by saying: "I could not sleep before I told it. I heard de clock every time it struck, an' I couldn't hole it no longer."

Deputy Sheriff Taylor stated that William Brown, one of the accused, had told him that he was informed Thursday night, the night before the crime was committed, of the plot, and that murder was planned. The plot, it is said, contemplated the killing of three other families, one of which was that of W. C. Schroeder, a real estate man of Richmond. The robbery and

Details of Crime.

All the negro witnesses told of how Isham Taylor deliberately shot down Walter Johnson, and of how Joe Taylor and Jenkins killed Mrs. Skipwith in her bed and dragged her body downstairs and placed it by that of Johnson. The latter, though his eyes had been shot out, was still living. He called Stepheney Johnson, the boy who came to his aid, saying that he knew Isham and Joe Taylor were killing him. The boy started, but Isham

After the killing the negroes robbed the house. Even a sewing machine was taken out, but Isham ordered the